

Pastor writes

The theme for our morning's meditation is, 'The compassionate love of God gives confidence to his children.' Very often we want to be recipients of this love but we are not willing to show that same kind of compassionate love to others. In the gospel reading from St. Luke, one of the Pharisees had invited Jesus for dinner. As he was eating a woman from the town who led a sinful life came into the house where Jesus was dining with an alabaster jar of perfume. The alabaster jar usually contained very expensive perfume and was meant to be used only on one occasion. The woman had either known or heard about Jesus as the one who forgives sins. She stood behind Jesus where he was reclining and was weeping profusely. Her tears wet the feet of Jesus and so she wiped the tears of his feet with her hair and kissed them. She then poured out the perfume on his feet. The entire action indicates one of affection and gratitude for what Jesus meant to her. Here was a public display of affection in front of an audience and the woman was not ashamed to do that. She undoes her hair and wipes Jesus' feet, an action that some of them considered as immodest. The woman shows humility and deep emotion. Her tears may have been tears of remorse for the sinful life that she lived and tears of joy knowing that in Christ her past was forgiven and that she had experienced the compassionate love of God in Christ.

The Pharisee who had invited Jesus was thinking to himself that if Jesus were indeed a prophet than he would know who was touching him and what kind of a woman she was. It was the touch that was irritating the Pharisee. How could an unclean woman touch a prophet? Jesus had allowed the woman to get too close to him for the Pharisee's comfort. The woman was probably a prostitute or an immoral woman whom society had ostracized. The point in the Pharisee's mind was that if Jesus was indeed a prophet he would know about the antecedents of this woman. The Pharisee was considering himself to be a very righteous person and was embarrassed at the presumed ignorance of Jesus about the woman.

Jesus then calls the Pharisee by name as Simon and tells him a parable about a money lender and two debtors. One owed him about a lakh and fifty thousand rupees, and the other about fifteen thousand rupees. Both of them were unable to repay their loans. The money lender was however a gracious and a compassionate man and he forgave both of them their debts. Jesus then asked the Pharisee as to which of them would love the money lender more. The Pharisee replied that it would be the one who had the bigger debt forgiven. Jesus tells him that he had judged correctly. Jesus then says to Simon that when he came into the house he did not give any water for washing his feet but the woman wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss but this woman kissed my feet. You did not put oil on my head but she has poured perfume on my feet. All the basic etiquettes of hospitality which

would have been expected of a host were not done for Jesus. Jesus tells him that her many sins had been forgiven. The one who had been forgiven little loves little. In other words, the Pharisee had not experienced God's extravagant and compassionate love, and therefore did not know how to love Lord with all of himself.

Jesus than addresses the woman and said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' The other guests were annoyed at Jesus and were saying among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Jesus is God in human form and has the authority to forgive sin. No sinner is too far gone for the compassionate love of God to reach out to that person. God's forgiveness is available to us when we turn to him. Jesus tells the woman your faith has saved you. The woman had come with a hope of being forgiven and leading a new life which she had seen as possible through Jesus. The faith with which she came had been duly rewarded and she is assured of her sins forgiven and is asked to go in peace.

God reaches out to the sinner. We may have backslide in our life and feel that we cannot be forgiven, or we may have strayed away from God that we feel that God will never forgive a sinner like me. But God's compassionate love reaches out to us. God does not desire the death of a sinner but wishes that they would repent and come back to him. May we in this Lenten period have confidence in the compassionate love of God and turn away from sin and be faithful to him.

Shalom
Paul Swarup

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